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The Whitley Lecture 2016 Church Without Walls

Post-Soviet Baptists after the Ukrainian Revolution, 2013-14

Joshua T. Searle



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Foreword by Sally Nelson

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Photo of Christians from various Ukrainian churches (Baptist, Catholic and Orthodox)
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The Whitley Lecture

The Whitley Lecture was first established in 1949 in honour of W.T. Whitley (1861–1947), the Baptist minister and historian. Following a pastorate in Bridlington, during which he also taught at Rawdon College in Yorkshire, Whitley became the first Principal of the Baptist College of Victoria in Melbourne, Australia, in 1891. This institution was later renamed Whitley College in his honour.

Whitley was a key figure in the formation of the Baptist Historical Society in 1908. He edited its journal, which soon gained an international reputation for the quality of its contents – a reputation it still enjoys nearly a century later as the *Baptist Quarterly*. His *A History of British Baptists* (London: Charles Griffin, 1923) remains an important source of information and comment for contemporary historians. Altogether he made an important contribution to Baptist life and self-understanding in Britain and Australia, providing a model of how a pastor-scholar might enrich the life and faith of others.

The establishment of the annual lecture in his name is designed as an encouragement to research and writing by Baptist scholars, and to enable the results of this work to be published. The giving of grants, advice and other forms of support by the Lectureship Committee serves the same purpose. The committee consists of representatives of the British Baptist Colleges, the Baptist Union of Great Britain, BMS World Mission, the Baptist Ministers' Fellowship and the Baptist Historical Society. These organizations also provide financial support for its work.

The Whitley Committee is delighted that Joshua Searle has accepted the invitation to deliver the annual lecture for 2016. Joshua is on the staff of Spurgeon's College and lectures in Theology and Public Thought, having spent time living and teaching in Ukraine, where he has family, through his marriage, and many personal friends.

His passion for this country and the work and witness of the Baptist Church there is not just of political interest in this rapidly changing part of the world. In exploring the complex relationship of Ukraine and Russia he also exposes some of the darker and deeper challenges of being radical believers.

Sandwiched between the suspicions of the Orthodox Church and the political state, free thinking Baptists have already paid a heavy price for their convictions. Joshua identifies some of the daily conflicts to be negotiated by Baptists in terms of civic duty, concluding that obedience ends where evil begins. It is no use focusing on the sins of individuals in the church while our state structures are complicit with injustice. We may profitably reflect on the implications for ourselves in the market-centred West.

Sally Nelson, Secretary to the Whitley Committee

PREFACE

I am very grateful to the Whitley Committee for the kind invitation to give the 2016 Whitley Lecture. It is a privilege to have been asked to deliver this significant lecture series and I hope that I have honoured the intention of the Committee to put valuable scholarship to the service of theological reflection among the British and worldwide Baptist community. Having lived and worked as a missionary in the city of Donetsk between 2011 and 2013, I have chosen to focus on Ukraine and the plight of the Baptist community in the wake of the Ukrainian Revolution of Dignity and Freedom in 2013–14. My aim is to elucidate the church's role in public life by setting out a simple and generous evangelical vision of Christian engagement that is humble, hospitable, full of grace, ready to listen, learn and serve, and to stand in solidarity with society in defence of the fundamental gospel values of truth, freedom, love and justice.

I dedicate this lecture to Michael Bourdeaux in appreciation for his lifetime of indefatigable advocacy on behalf of the millions who suffered persecution for their faith in the Soviet Union. Michael has been a tremendous source of moral support and encouragement to me personally in recent years and his fine example of courage and dedication to the gospel of freedom and truth continues to inspire my generation to look to the future with hope. I take this opportunity to express my warmest thanks to my colleagues at Spurgeon's College for their support and encouragement. I also thank my courageous and gifted friends and mission partners at Mission Eurasia.¹ In particular, I convey my deepest gratitude and respect to Sergey Rakhuba and Mykhailo Cherenkov for their friendship and inspiration. I am also very grateful to Anne Clements for her judicious proofreading of this text.

All translations from Ukrainian, Russian and German in this lecture are my own, except where indicated otherwise.

Joshua T. Searle
Spurgeon's College London,
October 2015

¹ Mission Eurasia is a large mission organisation that works to train, equip and mobilise Christians throughout post-Soviet Eurasia to engage in evangelism, church-planting, and humanitarian relief projects by developing creative and strategic ministries. Mission Eurasia has recently been established as a registered charity (no. 1161511) in the UK. For more information, see <https://missioneurasia.org>.

EPIGRAPH

‘In Far Siberia’s Deepest Soil’ (1827)

Несчастью верная сестра,
Надежда в мрачном подземелье
Разбудит бодрость и веселье,
Придет желанная пора:
Hope, the faithful sister to all sorrow,
In your dark dungeon,
Awakens courage and joy;
The hoped-for time will come

Любовь и дружество до вас
Дойдут сквозь мрачные затворы,
Как в ваши каторжные норы
Доходит мой свободный глас.
Then love and friendship will perforate
The gloomy gates of your captivity,
And shatter the bolts of servitude
The voice of freedom calls to you

Оковы тяжкие падут,
Темницы рухнут — и свобода

Вас примет радостно у входа,

И братья меч вам отдадут.

The heavy shackles will fall,

The gloomy prisons will crumble,

Freedom will joyfully greet you at the gates,

And the brothers will give you a sword.

—Alexander Pushkin (1799–1837)

INTRODUCTION

Anyone with a romantic frame of mind and a love of beauty cannot help being captivated by Ukraine. Ukrainian culture – nurtured by an exuberant tradition of poetry, literature, music, and creative arts – possesses a depth and vigour that few nations could rival. As well as being married to a Ukrainian, I am privileged to count several Ukrainians as some of my closest friends. I have found the Ukrainian people, on the whole, to be imbued with a passionate and innate love of freedom. Moreover, unlike other nations that I have visited in post-Soviet Eurasia, Christianity permeates every aspect of Ukrainian culture. As one prominent Ukrainian historian remarks, “One cannot possibly understand any aspect of the cultural, social, political, or even the economic life of [Ukraine] in the last thousand years without taking into account the contribution of Christianity, its teachings, liturgical practices, ethical norms, social and personal spirituality, church art and popular piety.”²

Since gaining independence in 1991, Ukraine has been the major hub of evangelistic and humanitarian activity throughout Eastern Europe, Russia and Central Asia. Social scientists have even referred to Ukraine as the “Bible belt” of the Former Soviet Union.³ Despite strong resistance from entrenched Soviet mentalities and the passing of unfavourable legislation, Ukrainian Christians succeeded in establishing various NGOs, Christian missions, evangelical think tanks and various centres of theological education. For those with ears to hear and eyes to see, the Holy Spirit has been active in various ways in Ukrainian society in the twenty five years since the demise of the USSR. I have long been convinced that of all the nations in Eastern Europe, it is Ukraine which has the greatest potential to become a beacon of light and hope to the people of the Former Soviet Union. I am also persuaded that the Baptist community in Ukraine, despite its relatively small size, can play a leading role not only in the renewal of the churches, but also in the transformation of all spheres of post-Soviet society in accordance with gospel values.

Ukraine has now reached a critical turning point in its history. In November 2013 hundreds of thousands of people, including some close personal friends of mine, took to the

² Oleh Turij, “Das religiöse Leben und die zwischenkonfessionellen Verhältnisse in der Ukraine seit der Wende”, in *Vom Umbruch zum Aufbruch? Kirchliche und gesellschaftliche Entwicklungen in Ostmitteleuropa nach dem Zerfall des Kommunismus*, edited by Dietmar W. Winkler (Vienna: Tyrolia, 2010), 257.

³ Catherine Wanner, *Communities of the Converted: Ukrainians and Global Evangelism* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2007), 2.

streets of Ukraine's capital city, Kyiv, to protest against the refusal of the Ukrainian government to sign a treaty that would have led to closer integration with Europe. The central square in Kyiv, known as Maidan Nezalezhnosti (*Майдан Незалежності*, translated as "Independence Square"), became a rallying point for the protestors.

Several people died in the mainly peaceful protests, which were met with bulldozers, batons and police violence in the winter of 2013. In February 2014 the violence peaked and 103 protestors and 13 policemen were killed. It soon emerged that among the dead protestors there were dozens of Christians, including one young Baptist, Alexander Khrapachenko, who was a cousin of a friend and former colleague of mine. Alexander, like the others in the "Heavenly Hundred" (*Небесна сотня*), was campaigning to ensure the future of a free Ukraine. He paid the ultimate price when he was shot in the head by a police sniper on 20th February 2014.

Alexander and millions of other Ukrainians like him were protesting against a state that had become little more than a system of organised "kleptocracy"⁴ and extortion. Law had become not a principle that guaranteed the rights of all citizens, but a tool in the hands of a corrupt elite that could be applied to extort money and power. Under Ukraine's fraudulent Russian-backed President, Viktor Yanukovich, the Ukrainian state had become a vehicle for the self-enrichment of the President's family and a narrow circle of oligarchs and regime insiders. When he took power in 2010 Yanukovich set about looting the Ukrainian economy. In just four years, it is alleged that he had embezzled \$100 billion from the state funds of Ukraine. When he fled Ukraine, protestors entered his estate and found evidence of grotesque luxury and a large cache of incriminating documents that he had tried to dispose of in a lake before he left. Escaping from his presidential palace, Yanukovich took with him an estimated \$32 billion of Ukrainian state funds over the border to Russia. The documents that were recovered from the lake at his palace showed that, as widows, orphans and pensioners were literally freezing to death during the severe Ukrainian winters, Yanukovich was adorning his vast estate with Lebanese cedar doors at a cost of \$64,000 each and spending \$328,000 on wall panelling for his winter garden. According to local press reports, other documents included a "\$12 million hand-written cheque to an undisclosed beneficiary" and "a €39

⁴ Andrey Piontkovsky provides a helpful definition of "kleptocracy" as the "merging of money and political power; the institutionalization of corruption; and the domination of the economy by major corporations, chiefly trading in commodities, which flourish thanks to public resources." Quoted in Karen Dawisha, *Putin's Kleptocracy: Who Owns Russia?* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 2014), 355.

million chandelier supply contract.”⁵ Under Yanukovych’s regime, the structures and social values that support civil society were fatally assaulted as the corrupt system of organised kleptocracy was fed by an abyss of moral and legal nihilism.

After the grotesque regime of the discredited tyrant, Yanukovych, Ukrainian society required not just constitutional reform, but a wholesale social reformation, involving a transformation of values that would signify a clear break from the state-authorised crime, corruption and indignity of the post-Independence era. In this regard, the “Revolution of Dignity” (*Революція гідності*) – as it came to be known – came to symbolize the awakening of civil society in Ukraine as a whole and the reinstitution of the values of dignity and respect throughout the country after the shameful debacle of Yanukovych’s criminal regime.

Therefore, contrary to the Russian propaganda about “Ukrainian fascists in Kyiv” and the fabricated threats to Russian citizens in Ukraine, the main aims of the revolution were social justice, democracy and the rule of law.⁶ Although certain extremist elements took advantage of the protests at a later stage, the revolution in Kyiv was a people’s revolution that built on the spontaneous outpouring of discontent and even disgust of millions of ordinary Ukrainians at Yanukovych’s “sociopathic state.”⁷ The Revolution of Dignity was instigated and sustained by ordinary people, such as students and young professionals, together with workers, the elderly and retired, who rose up against a corrupt regime that had attempted to turn the organs of state power into instruments for the repression of all civil and political opposition.⁸

There had been other episodes of revolutionary ferment in post-Soviet Ukraine. In 1991 Ukraine declared its independence from the Soviet Union. In 2004-5 hundreds of thousands of protestors took to the streets in a mass rally that became known as the “Orange Revolution”. The protestors were demonstrating against the corrupt presidential election, which was rigged to give the impression that Viktor Yanukovych had gained the most votes. The Orange Revolution succeeded in overturning this result and fresh elections were called, which resulted in a majority for the reformist President, Viktor Yushchenko. Unfortunately for Ukraine, the new leaders of the Orange government were unable to unite and soon succumbed to infighting, which gave the opportunity for Yanukovych to be elected in 2010 with the help of Putin’s Russia, which spent millions of dollars on Yanukovych’s election

⁵ Matthew Luxmoore, “Journalists gather for Mezyhirya Fest investigate conference at fugitive ex-president’s estate,” *Kyiv Post* 8th June 2014.

⁶ Andrew Wilson, *Ukraine Crisis: What it Means for the West* (Yale: Yale University Press, 2014), 2.

⁷ *Ibid.*, 36.

⁸ Кристина Бердинских, *Слюди: Теплі історії з Майдану* (Kyiv: Bright Star Publishing, 2014).

campaign. The result was an unmitigated disaster for Ukraine, as the country was brought further into Russia's sphere of influence and corruption became even more endemic at every level of Ukrainian society.

One of the key differences between the 2014 demonstrations and both the Declaration of Independence in 1991 and the Orange Revolution of 2004-5 was the unprecedented ecumenical mobilisation of all the main Ukrainian churches in defence of fundamental human values of dignity and freedom. For the first time in post-Soviet history, all the major churches stood in solidarity with society against the state. This is important because recent surveys have shown that the church enjoys the highest level of trust among all sectors of Ukrainian society.⁹ The support that the churches gave to the Revolution of Dignity seems to have further consolidated this trust among the general population. At the height of the protests in December 2013, my friend and former colleague, Dr Mykhailo Cherenkov, commented that, "While the government is paralyzed, the church has become a source of support. People are hiding in churches from the repression of the police, church representatives are calling on the people to take peaceful action and on the authorities to fear God. The main force behind the protests is young people and students – the future of Ukraine." For the first time in post-Soviet history, the church in Ukraine was found to be on the side of social reform. The response of the Ukrainian churches to the recent revolutionary events will be a major focus of this lecture.¹⁰

The Plight of Baptists in Ukraine Today

Now that the protests on Kyiv's central square are over and a new democratic government has been elected, Ukraine is now under a concerted attack and occupation by regular Russian armed forces, who have joined forces with local pro-Russian militia in the Donbas region of Eastern Ukraine. In July 2014, the major Baptist seminary in Eastern Ukraine, Donetsk Christian University (DCU), was forcibly seized by Russian special forces, operating under the cover of the "Donetsk People's Republic". This significant hub of Baptist education, where my wife and I worked from 2011 to 2013, has now been turned into a military base, home to around 400 militants. I was not on the DCU campus at the time, but I heard tearful accounts from friends and former colleagues, who told me that the militants arrived on campus on a sunny afternoon, armed with Kalashnikov rifles and rocket-propelled grenades.

⁹ See "The London Consultation: Resolution on Ukraine". Online: <http://www.bmsworldmission.org/news-blogs/archive/the-london-consultation-resolution-ukraine>.

¹⁰ For a detailed and moving account of the involvement of Christians in the demonstrations on Kyiv's Maidan, see Алексей Гордеев, *Церковь на майдане* (Kyiv: Knigonosha, 2014).

Speaking with pure Russian accents, these armed men threatened the staff and students who were on campus at the time with “court martial” (i.e. summary execution) if they did not comply fully with their orders. In an instant, these armed men forced them out of their homes and deprived them of their livelihoods. Reporting on this takeover, the former Baptist Rector of DCU noted recently that, “The academic buildings and dormitories have been converted into warehouses. Hostages are being held there and the dormitories have been transformed into torture chambers. A classroom of a private Christian school on the university campus has been turned into a shooting range where rebels shoot at Ukrainian symbols and children’s drawings. These activities are recorded and exhibited like trophies. Where my children once planted trees, now there are trenches and guns.”¹¹

Given my personal experience, part of the aim of this lecture will be to focus the attention of readers on the humanitarian catastrophe that is taking place in the Russian-occupied areas of Ukraine. Many people in the West do not know about Russia’s undeclared, “hybrid war” against Ukraine. Russian soldiers and their terrorist proxies in Donetsk and Luhansk are unleashing a reign of terror on the occupied territories.¹² The situation is particularly desperate for Christians in Ukrainian Crimea and the Eastern regions of Donetsk and Luhansk. Baptists, in particular, are suffering disproportionately, because they are regarded as dangerous “sectarians”, “schismatics” and even as “Western spies”. The hierarchy of the Russian Orthodox Church is suspicious of Baptists, whom it regards as a destabilising influence in its “canonical territory”.

As a result of the Russian occupation of these regions of Southern and Eastern Ukraine, the Baptist presence in Crimea and Donbass has been effectively eliminated, as Baptist and other evangelical leaders have been arrested, tortured and, in some cases, even murdered.¹³ In June 2015 Vice President of the Evangelical Baptist Union of Ukraine, Igor Bandura, reported that in the Donetsk region there are 56 Baptist churches that remain under Ukrainian control and 44 churches that are occupied by pro-Russian separatists. In the

¹¹ Mykhailo Cherenkov, “Reconciliation Begins at Home”, in *New Eastern Europe* 5 (September/October 2015), 66–7.

¹² For a summary of the Human Rights abuses in the Russian-occupied areas of Eastern Ukraine, see the UN “Report on the human rights situation in Ukraine”, commissioned by the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (November, 2014). Available online: http://www.ohchr.org/Documents/Countries/UA/OHCHR_seventh_reportUkraine20.11.14.pdf.

¹³ In June 2014 two deacons and two sons of the pastor of the Transfiguration Church of Christians of Evangelical Faith (Pentecostal) in the Russian-occupied town of Slovyansk were murdered by pro-Russian separatists. See: <http://www.nytimes.com/2014/09/07/world/europe/evidence-grows-of-russian-orthodox-clergys-aiding-ukraine-rebels.html>.

neighbouring Luhansk region the numbers are 24 churches and 50 churches respectively.¹⁴ Congregations in these regions have either fled or gone underground, as their church buildings have been confiscated by armed Russian and pro-Russian separatists.

People in the West have not adequately grasped that in post-Soviet Russia a new ideology has emerged, which constitutes the greatest threat to global peace and religious freedom in the world today. The name of this ideology is the “Russian World” (or *russkiy mir*). We in the West need to realise in particular how the notion of the so-called Russian World has started to dominate the discourse not only of the Kremlin but also of the Russian Orthodox Church. According to the Russian World ideology, so-called “Holy Russia” is said to be different from Western civilisation, and also superior to it.¹⁵ This ideology posits an irreconcilable state of enmity between the Atlanticist world, led by the United States and Britain, and the countries of post-Soviet Eurasia, led by Russia.¹⁶ This ideology regards Baptist and other non-Russian Orthodox Christians not as partners, but as enemy agents and dangerous dissenters.

The Russian World, with its triad of Orthodoxy–Autocracy–Nationalism, has filled the ideological void left by the Soviet Union. Under the dark and skilful manipulation of the mass media, the authorities in Russia have succeeded in mobilising most of Russia’s 143 million people into a formidable army of adherents who regard the West and its traditions of democracy, liberty and pluralism as its implacable enemy.¹⁷ In its more radical expressions, the Russian World ideology claims that “Holy Russia” has been specially appointed by God to save the world from the “evils” of democracy, liberalism and such “vices” as homosexuality.¹⁸ Under the influence of the Russian World ideology, nationalistic hatred is disguised as holiness and religious zeal. In today’s Russia, where “nothing is true and

¹⁴ Бандура, “В українських та російських баптистів єдине віровчення, але різне ставлення до свободи і гідності”. Online: http://risu.org.ua/ua/index/expert_thought/interview/60247.

¹⁵ Thomas Bremer, “Die Russische Orthodoxe Kirche und das Konzept der ‘Russischen Welt’”, *Russland-Analysen* 289 (January, 2015), 6–8.

¹⁶ Anton Shekhovtsov, “Putin’s Brain”, in *New Eastern Europe* 4 (September–October 2014), 72–79.

¹⁷ John O’Sullivan, “The difference between real journalism and Russia Today”, *Spectator* (December, 2014). Available online: <http://www.spectator.co.uk/features/9390782/the-truth-about-russia-today-is-that-it-is-putins-mouthpiece>.

¹⁸ There are clear echoes here of the delusions of Adolf Hitler, who similarly believed that “god” had chosen him to lead the German “Volk” in a divine mission to rid the world of liberals, gays, Jews and other “undesirables”. Recent commentators have pointed out the remarkable parallels between the foreign policy strategies of Adolf Hitler and Vladimir Putin. In the 1930s Hitler used the existence of large German populations in Czechoslovakia, Austria and Poland to justify his demands for territorial expansion. Today, this is precisely the policy that Putin’s Russia is pursuing in the countries of Eastern Europe and Central Asia, where substantial minorities of Russians live.

everything is possible”,¹⁹ it is ironic to see how the mafia-controlled regime that currently holds power in Russia assumes the pseudo-Christian legitimacy conferred by the notion of “Holy Russia”.²⁰ The sacralisation of the Russian World has reached such a level that social scientists are observing how the pro-Russian pseudo-states in South Eastern Ukraine are being transformed into “Russian Orthodox theocracies”²¹ and how fanatics of the Russian World ideology are pursuing a violent campaign of “Orthodox jihad” in a “Holy War” against “schismatics and sectarians”.²²

Why Should We Care about What is Happening in Ukraine?

All of this may seem like an academic or political debate about ideas, and as something that is far removed from theology or Baptist principles. The following questions might, therefore, be raised: “Why should we as British Baptists be concerned about what is happening in Ukraine?”; “Is the current conflict in Ukraine not – as Neville Chamberlain in 1938 infamously said about Czechoslovakia – just ‘a quarrel in a far away country between people of whom we know nothing’?”; “Are the events in Ukraine not primarily political in nature, and, if so, what is the need for the church to be involved in political processes?”

So far it seems that the only countries threatened directly by this ideology are Russia’s immediate neighbours. In Ukraine the Russian World ideology is causing death and destruction on a scale unknown since the collapse of the Soviet Union. Baptists and evangelicals have been tortured and murdered in the Russian-occupied territories of Ukraine. If these facts alone are not sufficient to cause us to care about what is happening, then it needs to be made clear just how volatile the situation is in Ukraine at this time. Unless decisive action is taken now, the Western world could be faced with not just a regional conflict in a small corner of Ukraine, but with nuclear weapons being unleashed by Russia against the capital cities of Europe and even North America. There is already alarm among Poles and Lithuanians that Putin may engage in the kind of brinkmanship that will result in a

¹⁹ This is the title of a book published in 2014 about Putin’s regime. See Peter Pomerantsev, *Nothing Is True and Everything Is Possible: The Surreal Heart of the New Russia* (New York: PublicAffairs, 2014).

²⁰ Karen Dawisha, *Putin’s Kleptocracy: Who Owns Russia?* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 2014).

²¹ Catherine Wanner, “The People’s Republic of Donetsk is becoming a theocracy”. Online: <http://qz.com/369015/the-peoples-republic-of-donetsk-is-becoming-a-theocracy>.

²² Mykhailo Cherenkov, “A Holy War Against Common Sense: Russia vs. Ukraine and West”. Online: http://www.catholicworldreport.com/Blog/3918/a_holy_war_against_common_sense_russia_vs_ukraine_and_west.aspx.

Russian nuclear bomb falling on Warsaw or Vilnius.²³ My Ukrainian friends are likewise afraid of the prospect of a nuclear war.

The use of nuclear weapons against Russia's "enemies" is being openly discussed on Russian state television and such weapons are a long-standing part of Russia's military strategy. One authoritative report, commissioned by the Royal Institute of International Affairs in June 2015, warns that, "Just because something is unimaginable for Western planners does not mean it is not considered a viable option by Russia."²⁴ As a result, the future not only of Ukraine, but of the whole of Eastern Europe, now hangs in the balance. If Putin's Russia manages to get its way in Ukraine, then the whole of Eastern Europe could be plunged into a new dark age of Russian-led serfdom. For those in the West who advocate appeasement and who speak of Russia's so-called "legitimate interests in Ukraine", let it be clear that Putin's Russia will not stop its aggressive policy of expansion in Ukraine. The whole of Europe (together with the Western values of freedom, accountability, democracy and civil society) could find itself confronted by an existential threat.

From my personal experience as well as from sustained reading and reflection on this issue, I now believe that the only way to counter the threat posed by the imperialistic Russian World ideology is by demonstrating unity in solidarity. The diplomatic efforts by the West can only secure temporary, imperfect ceasefire arrangements. Mykhailo Cherenkov remarks that, the religious aspect of the Russian World ideology that lies behind the violence "makes the conflict in Ukraine unresolvable by political or economic means. If the war against Ukraine is a Holy War for Holy Russia, then no sanctions or diplomatic agreements will end it."²⁵

There is no military solution to the current conflict. In a nuclear age, the principle of Mutually Assured Destruction (MAD) makes it futile to speak of any "winners" emerging from the inevitable Armageddon. Everyone and everything would be obliterated. Moreover, as we struggle against these violent and dehumanising ideologies, we should be aware of the danger that the fight against evil can easily acquire an evil character itself. The best way to dispel a shadow is by casting light onto it. Likewise, the way to respond to falsehood, hatred and violence is through truth-telling, compassion and peacemaking initiatives – or speaking

²³ See, for instance, the following article: www.thetimes.co.uk/tto/news/world/europe/article4399758.

²⁴ Keir Giles *et al* (eds.), *The Russian Challenge* (London: Chatham House, 2015).

²⁵ Mykhailo Cherenkov, "A Holy War Against Common Sense".

the truth in love.²⁶ As Christians we believe that God loves the persecutor just as much as the persecuted and that the aim of our efforts must not be the defeat and humiliation of those who call us their enemies. Rather, our aim as followers of the Risen Christ is to take the costly initiative of loving our enemies all the way to reconciliation.²⁷ As the President of the Evangelical Baptist Union of Ukraine, Valeriy Antonyuk, put it, “Evil can be defeated only by good, so we aim to be constant in prayer and service through works of compassion and mercy.”²⁸

For Baptists this principled stance is costly and challenging, especially considering that the Russian World ideology, which gained a foothold in Ukraine under Yanukovych’s term as President, left no room for religious pluralism or tolerance of Christian minorities, such as Baptists and other evangelical churches.²⁹ As such, the Russian World ideology reinforces the perception of Baptists as a marginal or alien presence in the territory of “Holy Russia.” There is no doubt that Baptists are a small minority within the family of churches in Ukraine. The membership of the All-Ukrainian Union of Churches of Evangelical Christians–Baptists (AUC ECB)³⁰ for 2010 was assessed at 151,000 members, although such figures are difficult to corroborate. Even if these figures are accurate, Ukrainian Baptists

²⁶ This was the main theme of the 2015 London Consultation on Ukraine at Lambeth Palace, London. The Consultation was co-hosted by Mission Eurasia and BMS World Mission. As Chairman of Mission Eurasia UK, I served as one of the co-moderators of the Consultation. The Consultation concluded with the signing of a Resolution, in which the signatories pledged to “commit to the development of formal and informal partnerships that will advocate for religious freedom and social justice in Ukraine through international networking and the sharing of resources.” See <http://www.bmsworldmission.org/news-blogs/archive/the-london-consultation-resolution-ukraine>.

²⁷ Glen H. Stassen, *A Thicker Jesus: Incarnational Discipleship in a Secular Age* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2012), 196–98.

²⁸ Антонюк, *Євангельська нива* 3 (2014), 2.

²⁹ Although the Baptists of the AUC ECB constitute the largest protestant denomination in Ukraine, other significant protestant churches include: the All-Ukraine Union of Churches of the Evangelical Faith–Pentecostals (AUU CEF); Ukrainian Christian Evangelical Church (UCEC); the Ukrainian Lutheran Church (ULC); and the Brotherhood of Independent Churches and Missions of Evangelical Christian Baptists of Ukraine.

³⁰ The term, “Christians–Baptists”, is part of a literal translation from the Ukrainian, *Всеукраїнський союз церков євангельських християн-баптистів*. For convenience, the AUC ECB is often referred to in English as the “Evangelical Baptist Union of Ukraine”. The awkwardness of the term, “All-Ukrainian Union of Churches of Evangelical Christians–Baptists”, reflects the confusion concerning evangelical and Baptist identity not only in Ukraine, but throughout the former USSR. The blurring of distinctions between Baptist, Pentecostals and other evangelical Christian groups is partly a legacy of the Soviet era. In 1944, under pressure from Stalin, the Union of Evangelical Christians and the Russian Baptist Union merged into the All-Union of the Evangelical Christians–Baptists (AUECB). Pentecostals and other independent evangelicals were pressured to register with the AUECB, whose freedom was severely curtailed by the Soviet authorities and there was even evidence that this organisation was deeply infiltrated by agents of the KGB. Some Baptists refused to accept this arrangement and were driven underground and persecuted for their faith. In 1961, these Baptists organised themselves into a breakaway organisation, known as the Church of Evangelicals Christians–Baptists, and became known as *initiativniki*, or “initiators”.

would constitute less than 0.4% of the total population of Ukraine.³¹ Given their minority status, Baptist communities in Ukraine and throughout the former USSR have tended to make a virtue of necessity by idealising their marginality. Withdrawal from the world, together with a perpetual waiting for “the end times”, was often regarded as the most faithful mode of Christian existence.³²

Therefore, from a Baptist perspective, one of the most remarkable outcomes of the Revolution of Dignity was the appointment of Oleksandr Turchynov as Interim President of Ukraine in 2014. Turchynov belongs to the Union of Life Baptist Church in Kyiv, where he is a regular preacher. He is the first Baptist to have held such a high position of political leadership in any country of the former USSR. The fact that Turchynov was a Baptist was played up by the Russian media, who portrayed him as a pawn of American interests and as a “sectarian” who did not fit into the ideological co-ordinates of the Russian World.³³ The polls demonstrated that, despite the hugely difficult challenges he faced and the unpopular decisions he was forced to make, his approval ratings were consistently high among the Ukrainian population as a whole. In the Ukrainian elections on 26th October 2014, four other Baptist Christians were elected to parliament (*Verkhovna Rada*). One of these was Pavel Unguryan, who now serves as Vice-Minister of Environment and Natural Resources of Ukraine. In a statement to the European Baptist Federation, Unguryan reported on the persecution of Baptists in the Russian-occupied areas of Ukraine, noting that, “The armed separatists are repeatedly breaking into the churches or believers’ homes and furiously shouting: ‘Our faith is Orthodox and you are traitors. You are American subjects and agents so we are going to eliminate you’.”³⁴

Turchynov’s brief term as President of Ukraine and the election of other Ukrainian Baptists to senior positions in government is symbolic of a deep shift in post-Soviet Baptists’ engagement in the political sphere. It is widely acknowledged that Baptist and evangelical Christians throughout Ukraine demonstrated overwhelming support for the Revolution of

³¹ According to the Baptist World Alliance, in 2013 there were 2,363 Baptist churches in Ukraine with a combined membership of 120,963, which makes the Ukrainian Baptist Union the second largest Baptist community in Europe, after the Baptist Union of Great Britain, which had 129,430 members. Online: <http://www.bwanet.org/about-us2/statistics>.

³² М. Н. Черенков, “Кадровые Церкви: проблемы и задачи христианского образования на выходе из постсоветского транзита”, in *Традиция подготовки служителей в братстве евангельских христиан-баптистов. История и перспективы* (Moscow: ASR, 2013), 254–61.

³³ Antoine Arjakovsky, *Russie-Ukraine: De la guerre à la paix?* (Paris: Parole et Silence, 2014), 67.

³⁴ “Christians targeted by separatists in Ukraine”, *Baptist Times* (30th July, 2014). Online: http://www.baptist.org.uk/Articles/410184/Christians_targeted_by_aspx

Dignity.³⁵ Whereas previously the reaction of most evangelical Christians to political events in their country was ostensibly neutral, there is now a prevailing conviction among Ukrainian evangelicals that the church represents the interests of the Kingdom of God throughout society and in all its spheres.³⁶ In an open letter, several leading Ukrainian Baptists insisted that, “Evangelical Christians cannot remain neutral while the state authorities are abusing their authority, while blood is being spilled by students, while corrupt courts pass tyrannical laws, and while law enforcement agencies do not protect the people and their representatives.”³⁷ The Ukrainian evangelical theologian, Viktor Manzhuл, likewise reflected on the way that the Maidan demonstrations had caused a fundamental shift in attitudes towards politics among Ukrainian evangelicals: “Previously, the election of deputies, mayors and presidents was a private issue for each Christian to decide for him or herself; but Maidan forced us to understand our political beliefs in terms of our church unions and associations.”³⁸

Like the Baptists, other Christian communities in Ukraine likewise discovered a new prophetic mandate to demonstrate solidarity with the Ukrainian people.³⁹ In the wake of the Revolution of Dignity, explains Mykhailo Cherenkov, “Protestants became ‘Ukrainian Protestants’, having begun to speak about the Ukrainian people as their own, historical churches as ‘brotherly’ institutions, social injustice as a plea for Christian solidarity, and politics as a common affair.” They were not consciously seeking solidarity, but, rather, they “found it manifested in their solidarity with the Ukrainian people, as if it were a gift.”⁴⁰ The denominational leaders of the Ukrainian Baptist community have consistently supported the Ukrainian Revolution of Dignity and have been involved in costly and courageous attempts to deliver humanitarian assistance to those in the occupied territories and to refugees throughout Ukraine. The current President of the Evangelical Baptist Union of Ukraine, Valeriy Antonyuk remarks that, “The church of Christ in Ukraine is an integral part of the Ukrainian nation, so we are aware of our spiritual responsibility to our people, especially in conditions of war.”⁴¹ Similarly, Vice President, Igor Bandura, observes that the Revolution of

³⁵ Гордеев, *Церковь на майдане*, 268–84.

³⁶ Гордеев, *Церковь на майдане*, 183–86.

³⁷ “Открытое письмо христианскому сообществу Украины” (11th December, 2013). Online: <http://www.christianmegapolis.com/2013/12/4923>.

³⁸ Виктор Манжул, “Протестантизм в Украине 2014 года. События, тенденции, вызовы, перспективы”. Online: risu.org.ua/ru/index/expert_thought/analytic/58704.

³⁹ On this point, see the excellent article by Maryana Hnyp, “Ukraine’s Spiritual Awakening”, *New Eastern Europe* 3-4 (May–August 2015), 55–62.

⁴⁰ Mykhailo Cherenkov, “Ukrainian Protestants After Maidan”, *Euxeinos. Governance and Culture in the Black Sea Region* 17 (April, 2015), 42.

⁴¹ Антонюк, *Євангельська нива* 3 (2014), 2.

Dignity, and the war between Russia and Ukraine which followed, helped to impress on the Baptist community “the importance and value of individual liberty, freedom of speech and religion, and the separation of church and state.” He adds that Ukrainian Baptists now have a greater understanding of their responsibility for raising a prophetic voice to uphold the justice, dignity and rights of the Ukrainian people as whole.⁴²

The Revolution of Dignity can thus be understood not merely as a political or even social event, but as a catalyst of deep, tectonic shifts in thinking about the interrelation between the church and the world, the nature of prophetic witness and the role of mission. The main difference between the Revolution of Dignity and earlier episodes of revolutionary ferment in post-Soviet Ukraine has been the unprecedented ecumenical mobilisation of all the main Ukrainian churches in support of the civil demonstrations in defence of fundamental human values of dignity and freedom.⁴³ In the history of the world, the Revolution of Dignity is merely an episode in a linear chronology. But in the history of the church, it may be the *kairos* moment ushering in a new series of opportunities and challenges. Ukrainian Christians can now bid farewell to the ideological remnants of a moribund and defunct (post-) Soviet system and to a society whose attitude towards Christianity wavered between grudging acceptance and outright hostility.

Therefore, one of the key contentions of this lecture is that the Revolution of Dignity signals the “coming of age” of the Ukrainian churches⁴⁴ and that this development will have major implications that extend beyond the national boundaries of Ukraine. I believe that despite their limited numbers, Baptists can be in the vanguard of a new movement for the reformation of the church and the renewal of society, which casts off the dismal legacy of corruption, inhumanity, inefficiency, unaccountability and servitude associated with the Soviet past, and moves towards an open future with hope for greater freedom. In order to do

⁴² Бандура, “В українських та російських баптистів єдине врівнення, але різне ставлення до свободи і гідності”. Online: http://risu.org.ua/ua/index/expert_thought/interview/60247.

⁴³ Roman Lunkin, “The Ukrainian Revolution and Christian Churches,” in *East West Church & Ministry Report* 22 (Summer 2014), 1–5.

⁴⁴ The religious landscape of Ukraine is very diverse. According to one social scientist, Ukraine is “a model of religious pluralism among formerly socialist societies” – see Catherine Wanner, “Missionaries of Faith and Culture: Evangelical Encounters in Ukraine”, *Slavic Review* 63 (2004), 736. Approximately 70 per cent of Ukrainians identify as “Orthodox”, but even within Ukrainian Orthodoxy there are three different traditions: the Ukrainian Orthodox Church–Kyiv Patriarchate; the Ukrainian Orthodox Church–Moscow Patriarchate; and the Ukrainian Autocephalous Orthodox Church. Although Ukraine has deep historical roots in Orthodoxy, the Ukrainian Greek Catholic Church is also prevalent, particularly in Western Ukraine. For a helpful and recent overview of the Catholic and Orthodox Churches and their influence on Ukrainian society and politics, see Michal Wawrzonek, *Religion and Politics in Ukraine: The Orthodox and Greek Catholic Churches* (Newcastle: Cambridge Scholars, 2014).

this, the Baptist community will need a renewed vision of its responsibilities towards the state and society.

Baptists' Responsibilities Towards the State and Society⁴⁵

The Revolution of Dignity has prompted new thinking among Ukrainian Baptists concerning the meaning and significance of basic terms, such as “power”, “the world”, “culture”, and “freedom” in the light of the gospel witness. There has been a radical re-evaluation of the demarcation between the spheres of legitimate influence of the church, the state and society, in light of biblical teachings concerning the responsibilities of Christians as citizens both of a particular nation state (Ukraine) and of God’s Kingdom.

The maps of the sacred and profane, religious and social have been redrawn. The task of the church is to discern between good and evil, between God and gods, to illuminate the front line in the spiritual battle against the powers and principalities that manifest themselves in social structures and political institutions, and to make the Kingdom of God a visible reality in the public sphere.⁴⁶ The Revolution of Dignity and its aftermath have led to the conviction that the church is called to engage with society, rather than withdraw from it. Neutrality is no longer an option. By not protecting the victims of state violence, the church is complicit in the crimes of the governing regime; by not calling evil that which is evil, the church colludes with the criminals.

In common with every citizen, Baptists have a clear responsibility towards the state.⁴⁷ This responsibility consists in maintaining order and staying within the law. The church and individual Christians are obedient to the authorities, on condition that these authorities carry

⁴⁵ The scope of this lecture precludes a detailed discussion of the meaning and application of the terms, “state” and “society” and their interrelation. My point of departure for reflecting on these concepts is the Hegelian distinction between “civil society” (*die Bürgerliche Gesellschaft*), “the family” (*die Familie*) and “the state” (*der Staat*). In contrast to the classical tradition of political theory, represented in the writings of Aquinas, Bodin, Hobbes, Spinoza, Locke and Kant, Hegel drew a clear distinction between the “political” and the “civil” spheres of ethical life. Civil society, for Hegel, describes a public sphere of ethical life in which “individuals seek to satisfy each others’ needs through work, production and exchange.” Hegel maintained that the role of the state was to represent universal values that transcend the irreconcilable conflicts over private interests that are an inevitable consequence of citizens’ participation in civil society. Civil society and the state are mutually dependent in so far as the competing interests within civil society require the regulation of the state. For its part, the state cannot reach its full ethical potential without the operation of a robust civil society. See G.W.F. Hegel, *Grundlinien der Philosophie des Rechts* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1986), 28; and Z. A. Pelczynski, “Political Community and Individual Freedom,” in Pelczynski (ed.), *The State and Civil Society: Studies in Hegel’s Political Philosophy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1984), 61.

⁴⁶ Miroslav Volf, *Public Faith, A: How Followers of Christ Should Serve the Common Good* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2011), xvi.

⁴⁷ Lee Canipe, *A Baptist Democracy: Separating God and Caesar in the Land of the Free* (Macon: Mercer, 2011), 108–26.

out their activities in compliance with the laws of the land and in accordance with the higher, moral law of truth and justice. However, obedience ends where evil begins. It is not the government, but moral conscience informed by the teachings of the Scriptures, which determines what is good and what is evil. If a contradiction arises between our duty of obedience towards the state and our biblically-informed convictions concerning good and evil, then “we must obey God rather than any human authority” (Acts 5:29).

Baptists, in common with all Christian citizens, are called upon to distinguish between good and evil, and thus to legitimise the power that protects from evil, and to delegitimise the power that serves evil. When those in power violate their legal and moral boundaries, they should not only be denied obedience, but should be actively resisted, as great Christian leaders such as Dietrich Bonhoeffer and Martin Luther King demonstrated. Thus, in distinguishing between good and evil, the church is responsible for submitting to legitimate authority which acts in accordance with the constitution and moral law. At the same time, the church has a sacred duty to resist lawless authority, which rewrites laws for itself and turns the legal system into a tool for the misappropriation of power and wealth by the state authorities.

Unfortunately, among many post-Soviet Baptists, we hear about obedience much more often than about resistance. Usually biblical proof-texts, such as Romans 13, are cited out of context to build a case for passive toleration of evil and corrupt regimes. Yet, if we read the Bible carefully, we see many examples of resistance to oppressive power. For instance, in 1 Samuel we read about God’s stern disapproval of the establishment of political power in Israel. In Ecclesiastes the Preacher decries all political authority as vanity and hollow conceit. In the New Testament, the condemnation of political authority is even more explicit. Jesus declares that control of political power is in the hand of Satan (Matthew 4:9). Paul asserts that all political powers are destined for annihilation and judgement (1 Corinthians 15:24) and in the Book of Revelation all political powers and institutions are condemned and destroyed together with the great Babylon in the final apocalyptic conflagration that precedes the coming of a new heavens and a new earth.⁴⁸

Servile obedience to godless and lawless authorities is not only contradictory to the teachings of the Scriptures; it is also inherently shameful, immoral and demeaning, and even

⁴⁸ See John Brigg’s “Preface” to *Freedom and the Powers: Perspectives from Baptist History*, edited by A. R. Cross and J. H. Y. Briggs (Didcot: Baptist Historical Society, 2014).

criminal. Such obedience constitutes a grievous violation of the natural order of good and evil and calls white that which is black (Isaiah 5:20). Proper obedience is demonstrated in the payment of taxes, in answering to the institutions of power, and in complying with existing legislation. Disobedience or resistance is demonstrated in criticising transgressions, in denouncing injustice, in the withholding of bribes, in peaceful meetings and civic rallies, and in the refusal to take up arms against peaceful citizens. During the Revolution of Dignity the vast majority of Ukrainian Baptists recognised that they were called to resist the power of the corrupt state. However, all revolutions have a shadow side. History teaches that revolutions inspired by noble virtues, such as Liberty, Equality and Fraternity, can quickly show signs of the same social and political pathologies that they were intended to eradicate.⁴⁹ Therefore, if revolutionary resistance to the state is to avoid acquiring a destructive character, it must be imbued with a Christian content, well-defined limits, and appropriate, non-violent modes of engagement.

Alongside their duties to the state, Baptists also have responsibilities toward the broader church and to society as a whole. In a world divided into spheres of religious influences, Baptist communities can create a place of meeting, dialogue and communication among the established historic churches. Such a healthy ecumenism means no more and no less than the acceptance of genuine ecclesiastical diversity, good neighbourliness and the preservation of openness to others. Baptists can be loyally and wholeheartedly committed to their own unique tradition without believing that it embodies final and exclusive truth, and without thereby abandoning the hope that there is more to be learned from other traditions.⁵⁰ Being a small minority, Baptists can relate to the established churches in Ukraine by considering each person (Orthodox or Catholic) individually, taking into account the specificity and diversity of each person's convictions in a way that conveys honour and respect. Baptists can relate to Orthodoxy in the context of the history of the church, rather than through prejudiced beliefs concerning autocratic policies or national chauvinism. Baptists can relate to the state by respecting the law and fulfilling their political duties and responsibilities to all people. Baptists can relate to society by demonstrating solidarity with the legitimate aspirations of ordinary people for freedom and dignity.

⁴⁹ Slavoj Žižek, *Less Than Nothing: Hegel and the Shadow of Dialectical Materialism* (London: Verso, 2012), 318–23.

⁵⁰ Joshua T. Searle, "The Ecumenical Imperative and the Kingdom of God", *Journal of European Baptist Studies* (September, 2013), 5–23.

Above all, Baptists must avoid the temptation to become too closely aligned with the interests of the state, which can lead to a dangerous sacralisation of state power. To Baptists, the “harmony” between church and state, which is regarded by the Orthodox Church as a sacred archetype, is merely a pragmatic political construct and something human, even “all too human.” For Baptists the archetypes of a “God-bearing people,” “Holy Russia,” and “Orthodox people” are devoid of their customary magical hold. Throughout their history, Baptists have learned that the alliance of church and state is without biblical justification and is morally bankrupt. The recent history of Russia demonstrates that the hegemony of the (Russian) Orthodox Church in post-Soviet society does not lead to spiritual revival, but merely creates a thin veneer of Christianity among a people who live in fear of the all-powerful church-state. Neither Orthodox monarchism nor atheistic communism, along with their prevailing authoritarianism, is compatible with the freedom of the gospel.

History affords numerous examples of the fatal consequences that can ensue when political and religious institutions are united into the totality of a single authority. Under such conditions, Christianity can become conscripted by imperialistic ideologies, resulting in a demonic hybrid of pseudo-Christian dogma and xenophobic nationalism. This kind of fake patriotic religion leads to the blasphemous deification of the state. Moreover, “national churches” can invoke the name of “God” as an idol who has bestowed a special blessing and favour on a particular nation, which then allegedly gives this “special” nation the right to invade and conquer neighbouring territories and subdue their peoples – as we are currently witnessing in Ukraine. Such a sham Christianity, which is a denial of Christ and the gospel, will always refuse to accept any higher power and will ruthlessly destroy any forms of genuine Christian faith that go beyond cultural or national identity. This kind of idolatrous, nationalistic “official Christianity”, which encourages war and hatred towards other nations, is a demonic distortion of the gospel and is under the control not of Christ, but of the dark “powers and principalities” which Paul alluded to in his Epistle to the Ephesians. Baptists are thus right to be cautious of such alliances between the church and state, especially in the present context of post-Soviet Eurasia.

The church is responsible not only to the political authorities (the state), but also to the people (society). Since the fall of the USSR, the witness of post-Soviet Christians has been enervated by a dangerous imbalance in the relationship between the church and the state, on the one hand, and between the church and society on the other. The church has tended to build a separate relationship with the state, promising it its loyalty in exchange for

benefits, patronage, and preferential treatment. As the church and state grew closer, society began to lose respect both for the state and the church. In Ukraine and other nations of the former USSR, society became alienated from both the church and the state.

The political system of a society includes both the state and civil society.⁵¹ A free church should be part of a free civil society, rather than an appendage or servant of the state.⁵² In reality, however, the post-Soviet church became, in effect, co-ruler with the state. The place of the church is in society, but although the church is accountable to society, it is not the possession of society (and it is certainly not the possession of the state). The church is directly subordinate only to God. In terms of the responsibility of the church to the state and society, a natural asymmetry can be postulated: responsibility towards society (i.e. towards one's "neighbour" in the broadest sense of Luke 10:25-37) precedes the church's loyalty to the state. Furthermore, the church has a duty of obedience to the state only insofar as the state protects the welfare of one's neighbours and the general well-being of the people. If we maintain that the responsibility of the Church is primarily to God, then the order of responsibility is as follows: firstly, to God, then to society (the people), and, lastly, to the state. The church's responsibility to society can be expressed positively in solidarity and negatively in constructive disagreement with social trends that do not correspond to the gospel values of truth, freedom, respect, dignity and compassion.

Thus, in relation to society, it seems that the church is enamoured of disagreement and forgetful about solidarity. The church's responsibility to the state therefore takes two forms: one positive (obedience), and the other negative (resistance). We need to restore the natural order of responsibility: first, to God; secondly, to society; and after these comes the state; and we also need to remember the forgotten forms of responsibility – the possibility and even the necessity of resistance to the state that often results from solidarity with society.

The Revolution of Dignity has forced post-Soviet evangelicals to address a question they long avoided: in what way is the gospel not only the source of personal salvation, but also the source of social transformation? Post-Soviet evangelical churches are known for two features: their focus on the personal relationship with God and on evangelistic activity. However, it is now apparent that the times call for a radical overhaul of the individualist

⁵¹ Charles Taylor, *Hegel and Modern Society* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1979), 88; Khilnani, "The Development of Civil Society", in Sudipta Kaviraj and Sunil Khilnani (eds.), *Civil Society: History and Possibilities* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 23.

⁵² A useful contrast could be made with Bernard Green's book, *Baptists and the Third Reich* (Didcot: Baptist Historical Society, 2008).

modes of evangelisation that were exported to Ukraine by Western missionaries in the years following the implosion of the Soviet Union, but which were so unsuited to the communitarian context of post-Soviet society.⁵³ After the Revolution, both the evangelical and the historical churches have been faced with the unsettling truth that personal faith and evangelism alone are no long sufficient. The revolutionary events in Ukraine have demonstrated that traditional understandings of the church's responsibilities toward the state and society have been exhausted and are in need of revision.

In light of this new reality, those of us who are Christians – particularly in Ukraine and Russia, but also in the West – need to ask ourselves some searching questions: Why is it that we as evangelical Christians seem to take an unseemly relish in exposing the sins of ordinary people in our churches, but maintain a cowardly silence concerning the sins of those in power? Do we not see that our silence is a sign of consent, and that with our acquiescence we untie the hands of the wrongdoers? Do we lack the moral imagination to envision the possibility of living in a country without bribes and without lies? Is it even possible to live the Christian life if the entire structure of society requires people to compromise their Christian principles of honesty, openness, integrity and compassion? If the state and society are corrupt, should we simply endure it and take no steps to address this social evil? If we lack the moral courage to take upon ourselves the legal responsibility for the government and the situation in our country, then why do we wonder at the immorality of society and the nihilism of ordinary people? If we as the church are not in solidarity with the people, then why should the people be in solidarity with the church? Who needs us if we have nothing to offer? Who will look out for us if we are not willing to be our brother's keeper? Just imagine that you had been standing there in place of those on Kyiv's Maidan, in the sniper's line of fire – if that were you, would you want to enter a church that stayed neutral during the national disaster or that approved of the regime that was opposing its people? In this situation, I think that instead of calling the people to repent and make peace, we ourselves should repent for betraying the people, and for failing for so many years to speak truthfully to those in power and to stand on the side of the oppressed.

⁵³ Steven Chapman, "Collectivism in the Russian World View and Its Implications for Christian Ministry." *East-West Church and Ministry Report* 6 (Autumn, 1998), 12–14.

The Mission of a Free Church in an Open Society: From Evangelical Activism to *Missio Dei*

After the Revolution of Dignity, Christianity in Ukraine is entering a new era. For too long, post-Soviet Baptists neglected theology, including ecclesiology, focusing on “mission” in its most basic sense as “evangelism.” Before long, the needs of mission dictated the need for missiology, and the questions of missiology came up against the need for a comprehensive theological analysis of the ties that bind the church and the Kingdom of God, community and society, mission and education, and religion and culture.

Too often, post-Soviet Baptists have abdicated their social responsibility. Some churches have reduced the task of mission to exhorting people to join *their* church. Ukrainian Pastor, Sergey Golovin, remarks that, instead of fulfilling Christ’s Great Commission to “go and make disciples of all nations,” post-Soviet Baptists have tended to say, “go and lure them into church buildings.” As a result, mission serves only the church institution. Society remains without a transformative influence as churches relinquish their vocation to be salt and light. The light shines only upon the faithful and the salt is distributed only to members of the church. But this is not what Christ meant when he said:

You are the salt of the earth. But if the salt loses its saltiness, how can it be made salty again? It is no longer good for anything, except to be thrown out and trampled underfoot. You are the light of the world. A town built on a hill cannot be hidden. Neither do people light a lamp and put it under a bowl. Instead they put it on its stand, and it gives light to everyone in the house. In the same way, let your light shine before others, that they may see your good deeds and glorify your Father in heaven (Matthew 5:13–16).

The radical French theologian, Jacques Ellul, maintained that,

... we must not wait for people to come to church, or to meetings organised by Christians. To evangelise means to go into groups and

meetings of people who are not Christians. To evangelise is to declare a gospel which enters the concrete interests, the anxieties and hopes of these people. It is not a good news which is abstract and spiritual.⁵⁴

Baptists need to reject exclusivity and narrow pietism that over-emphasises individual salvation. Instead, there needs to be a vision of holistic mission, in which both the individual and society, the spiritual and the social, the moral and the political become complementary parts of the overall Christian vision of biblically-informed action on behalf of the overriding biblical imperative of social justice.

As in the West, the well-intentioned emphasis of evangelicals on personal salvation and gaining individual converts has been misguided, especially when these emphases have been carried away with narrowly-defined personal issues at the expense of social responsibility. Moreover, any kind of “mission”, which is aimed solely at eliciting individual repentance through dire warnings about hell and eternal damnation, raises serious concerns about the motivations of the “convert.” One young theologian has helpfully noted that,

if someone is convinced that there is a place where they will be tormented after death, and that the only way to avoid this terror is by affirming that Jesus Christ is Lord, then they will no doubt make that affirmation, regardless of whether they are genuinely moved by Christ or not. This type of discourse endeavours to compel individuals to bow their knee regardless of their motives or the nature of their desire. Like a lover of nuts who is offered thousands of shells with no centre, so we offer God thousands of “converts” with no hearts.⁵⁵

These words call to mind the disturbing words of Jesus, who said: “Woe to you, teachers of the law and Pharisees, you hypocrites! You travel over land and sea to win a single convert, and when you have succeeded, you make them twice as much a child of hell as you are”

⁵⁴ Ellul, *False Presence of the Kingdom* (New York: Seabury, 1972), 103.

⁵⁵ Pete Rollins, *How (Not) to Speak of God* (SPCK: London, 2006), 36.

(Matthew 23:15). According to the late American Baptist theologian, James McClendon Jr., this focus on making converts constitutes a demonic perversion of the true task of mission. “The perversion associated with evangelism”, notes McClendon, “is potentially the more demonic . . . just to the degree that in a crass way it succeeds. Members are added; the institution grows; but in this phony evangelism, the gospel is choked out by that growth.” This is what happens when the highest goal of mission becomes the making of converts, which results in “an infinite regress of mere recruitment” that takes the place of any “real (or realistic) understanding of the point of evangelism.”⁵⁶

In conclusion, it can be observed that the Baptist movement in post-Soviet Eurasia is experiencing a time of transition. The contours of the future are still hazy; we look as through a glass darkly. Nevertheless, we can identify four stages of transition that the post-Soviet church is currently passing through. First, post-Soviet Christianity is experiencing a transition from a confessional understanding of the “mission of the Church” to a “missiology of the Kingdom.” Walter Sawatsky called this a turning away from “church-centered missiology” to “God-centered missiology” when “mission is no longer limited to the established Church, rather it signifies shalom in the Kingdom.”⁵⁷ There is a gradual recognition that mission is not to be equated with evangelistic activities or outreach programs, but is much more about the whole of life. Mission is not about inviting people to religious buildings to attend religious events organised by the church. Mission is much more a matter of engaging with the world and learning to listen to God’s heartbeat and discerning his purposes for particular communities in order encourage “more reflective and intelligent participation in those purposes.”⁵⁸

The gospel calls us to be a missional people. As one Anglican document put it: it is not so much that the Church has a mission, but that the God of mission has a church.⁵⁹ Mission has a theocentric, rather than an ecclesiocentric, object and point of departure. If mission, according the *missio Dei* paradigm developed by Barth⁶⁰ and Bosch⁶¹ and others,

⁵⁶ James Wm. McClendon, Jr., *Systematic Theology: Volume II: Doctrine* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1994), 439.

⁵⁷ Walter Sawatsky, “Without God We Cannot, Without Us God Won’t: Thoughts on God’s Mission within the CIS in the Future”, in Penner and Sawatsky (eds.), *Mission in the Former Soviet Union* (Schwarzenfeld: Neufeld Verlag, 2005), 258.

⁵⁸ Stephen Bevans and Roger Schroeder, *Constants in Context: A Theology of Mission for Today* (Maryknoll: Orbis, 2004), 1.

⁵⁹ James Rosenthal and Susan T. Erdey (eds.), *Living Communion: Anglican Consultative Council XIII* (London: Anglican Communion Office, 2006), 302.

⁶⁰ John G. Flett, *The Witness of God: The Trinity, Missio Dei, Karl Barth and the Nature of Christian Community* (Grand Rapids, Eerdmans, 2010).

⁶¹ David J. Bosch, *Transforming Mission: Paradigm Shifts in Theology of Mission* (Maryknoll: Orbis, 1991).

originates in the very nature of the Triune God, then mission becomes not so much an activity in which churches engage, but a divine imperative in which the church participates. The Kingdom of God, rather than the growth of the church, is the object of mission. The coming of that Kingdom “on earth as in heaven” (Matthew 6:10), rather than numerical conversions, is regarded as the true aim of mission. Mission is not about inviting people to religious services, but is concerned with the wholesale transfiguration of the kingdoms of this world into the “Kingdom of our Lord and of his Christ” (Rev 11:15).

Secondly, we are witnessing the transition from a particular understanding of mission as the “spiritual work” of a few designated “missionaries” to the idea of a holistic mission, covering all spheres of life and mobilising all the people of the church to participate in the *missio Dei*. Such participation involves a renewed commitment to work tirelessly in the struggle for social justice. A reconsideration of the idea of the “priesthood of all believers” provides impetus to a theological understanding of mission as a responsibility delegated to all the people of God. As Charles Spurgeon once quipped, “Every Christian is either a missionary or an imposter.” Related to this is the expansion of the social base of mission – from a ministry of professional missionaries to a movement of missional professionals. Ukraine has seen new missional initiatives, such as the creation of the Alliance of Christian Professional Associations and the mass publication of the *Desktop Gospel* (*Евангеліє на робочем столі*), in which Baptists have played a leading role. If previously mission boiled down to evangelism and the planting of new churches, today it inevitably involves discerning the activity of the transfiguring Word in the world and campaigning for social justice, which is itself a gospel imperative.

The third trend that can be observed in connection with cultural and demographic processes is the call to revive, awaken, and reform existing church structures in order to equip the church for mission and ministry in a changing world. The year 2013, which marked the 1025th anniversary of the establishment of Christianity in Kyivan Rus,⁶² highlighted the issue of nominal Christianity in the post-Soviet nations of the Eurasia. Despite the self-identification of most people throughout Russia, Ukraine, and Belarus as “Christian”, only a small percentage is made up of practicing Christians. In the popular perception, prayer, Bible and congregational life remain the esoteric occupations of a dwindling minority of “spiritual”

⁶² Kyivan Rus (*Київська Русь*) is the name given to the medieval federation of Eastern Slavic tribes. Although the federation was abolished by the Mongol invasions in the 1240s, many people in Ukraine, Russian and Belarus today claim cultural ancestry with the Rus.

people. In these traditionally “Orthodox” nations, society is transitioning into post-Christendom, and in many regions the church has become a museum, a relic to a bygone era.

Fourth, a shift is taking place from the usual short-term thinking and naive exclusivity to a meaningful partnership between traditions and regions. Thus, Peter Penner calls for dialogue and a “truly biblical partnership” in implementing “God’s mission” between foreign and national movements, as well as between Evangelical and Orthodox Churches.⁶³ The mission of the churches will be served not by fawning and borrowing, but by mutually enriching partnerships and the creative construction of localised missiologies.

These transitions mark a more profound shift in the missiological paradigm, which is still difficult to describe, but of a magnitude suggesting that it will result in a radical rethinking of the church and its vocation. It is no accident that these processes coincide in time with the upcoming 500th anniversary of the European Reformation. Some Ukrainian theologians and historians have even argued that post-Soviet evangelical Christians have skipped their Reformation.⁶⁴ It is possible that the aftermath of the Revolution of Dignity offers another opportunity to renew the church and transform society. Such a “reformation” would be directed not merely towards the renewal of the church, but also the transfiguration of society.

In the same way that the sixteenth-century Reformers used the phrase, “*Ecclesia semper reformanda est*”,⁶⁵ so the Kyiv-born philosopher, Nikolai Berdyaev (1874–1948), insisted that, “Revolution is a perpetual phenomenon in the destinies of human societies.”⁶⁶ Revolution is the harbinger of new life, but the revolutionary period is always preceded by labour pangs that presage the birth of a new awakening of the consciousness of freedom. Although the failure of previous attempts to instigate social reform in Ukraine can be attributed to the egotism and ambition of corrupt politicians, at a more fundamental level these “revolutions” failed because the revolutionary forces that they unleashed were absorbed and eventually assimilated by the system that was predicated on the distorted values of a

⁶³ Peter F. Penner, “Critical Evaluation of Recent Developments in the CIS”, in Penner and Sawatsky (eds.), *Mission in the Former Soviet Union* (Schwarzenfeld: Neufeld Verlag, 2005), 120–64.

⁶⁴ The Ukrainian theologian, Dmitry Bintsarovskiy, uses the term, “Protestantism without a Reformation”, to define the theological heritage of post-Soviet evangelicals; see Dymtro Bincarovskij, “Protestantizm bez Reformatzii,” *Filosofska Dumka* 4 (2013), 212–29.

⁶⁵ “The church is in need of continual renewal.”

⁶⁶ Berdyaev, *Slavery and Freedom* (London: Geoffrey Bles, 1944), 189.

defunct Soviet ideology. The 1991 Declaration of Independence and the 2004 Orange Revolution represented change without transformation or “revolution without reformation.”⁶⁷

Therefore, in order to sustain lasting social change, society needs the church to imbue the public sphere with values that reflect the inclusive vision of compassion symbolised by the Kingdom of God. If civil society is the realm in which human values are developed for the common good of the whole public domain, then the church in the post-Soviet space is called upon to humanise society in the name of the Kingdom of God. Society can rightfully expect the church to demonstrate (rather than merely preach about) the cardinal Christian virtues of faith, hope, compassion and solidarity. The radical political implications of Jesus’ proclamation of the Kingdom of God and the transformative role of the church in society have far greater power to attract and inspire people than the isolated calls of the evangelist to personal repentance.

Church Without Walls: Reimagining Church and Post-Soviet Society

Post-secularism and post-Christendom create opportunities for the Church’s return to the public sphere. Public space is no longer considered either as necessarily “secular” or “Christian”. For the church, the door to society is wide open. The church’s main interest in an open society should be solidarity with society rather than patronage of the state. Post-Soviet Baptists can lead the way towards the church’s return to society. The current revolutionary situation may be a particularly auspicious time for the church to engage with society. Instead of vying for preferential treatment and struggling for influence, the church should educate its people and impart to them a new vision of hope because the future of post-Soviet society belongs to the people, and not to the oligarchs and corrupt state authorities.

As well as demonstrating fidelity to past traditions and concern for the present, the church in the power of the Holy Spirit has a prophetic mandate to foresee a new tomorrow. The prophetic vocation of the church is expressed in its capacity to anticipate the future, to warn of danger, and to serve as a harbinger of hope. The church that serves an open society must become the midwife of the future, because with the future comes the Kingdom of God.

⁶⁷ Hegel remarked that, “It is a modern folly to alter a corrupt ethical system, its constitution and legislation, without changing the religion, to have a revolution without a reformation.” Hegel, *Enzyklopedie der philosophischen Wissenschaft* (Hamburg: Meiner, 1959), 436; translation by Slavoj Žižek in his book, *Organs Without Bodies: On Deleuze and Consequences* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2004), 186.

The church should anticipate and embody renewal, awakening and rebirth and should prepare and educate its people to live out their prophetic calling as agents of the Kingdom of God. We must focus on preparatory work for the future, rather than on responding to and struggling with what we have already outlived and agonised over. It is obvious to everyone that the current order has lost legitimacy – the emperor has no clothes. The dismal legacy of the seventy-year Soviet catastrophe and the spirit of servitude, falsehood and disrespect that it nurtured have left their mark on post-Soviet society today. Given the widespread cynicism towards political institutions, the post-Soviet church is called not only to engage in politics, but should itself become a *polis*, which embodies an alternative vision for political engagement and mediation between society and the state.⁶⁸

This alternative vision is well encapsulated by the term, “church without walls”. A reflection on the witness of Christians during and after the Revolution of Dignity yields a thought-provoking answer to the basic question: “What is the church?” The Greek word, ἐκκλησία, translated in English Bibles as “church”, contains two primary significations. The first part, “ek”, indicates “out from” or “out to”, and the second part, “kaleo”, signifies “to call.” In a strictly linguistic sense, therefore, the church is that which is “called out from or to” something. As well as this notion of being “called out”, the term, ἐκκλησία, in the Bible connotes two meanings: firstly, the “church” is the local community of believers gathered for the sake of worship and witness in a particular place; secondly, it is the mystical community that constitutes the fulfilment of God’s eternal plan of creation, redemption and glorification.

It is significant that in the whole Bible there is no single reference to the church as an organisation, institution or building. The church – in the sense of a community that is “called out” – is thus both an empirical and an eschatological reality. The fullest expression of the meaning and nature of the church is to be found in the last book of the Bible, Revelation. The New Jerusalem of Revelation 21 represents a transfigured world and the fusion of the entire human community into a spiritual fellowship without barriers or distinctions of any kind. The church is a radically inclusive eschatological community. Nowhere in the Gospels do we read of Jesus’s establishing a religious institution. In fact, quite the opposite is the case. Far from founding a religious institution based on order and hierarchy, he built a community in which the values of compassion and justice were lived out in the context of a new order of existence made possible by the Kingdom of God. In fact, Jesus even explicitly discouraged the kind of

⁶⁸ Stanley Hauerwas and William Willimon, *Resident Aliens: Life in the Christian Colony* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1989), 46–7.

hierarchical order and power relations that governed the “kings of the Gentiles” – the secular powers that regulate the systems of the world (Luke 22:24–26).

The problem in many post-Soviet churches (as in the West) is that missionaries and church planters have tried to build the Kingdom of God through programmes and evangelisation outreach strategies, which have had little relationship value. God – as Father, Son and Holy Spirit – has ordained community as his chosen means to build his Kingdom on earth. The early churches were not “churches” in the modern sense at all; the earliest Christians had no designated buildings of worship, but would congregate in each others’ houses, offer hospitality, share each others’ stories and read and reflect together on the meaning of Scripture.

Church without walls is a community that welcomes people into fellowship without first insisting that they conform to accepted patterns of “Christian behaviour” or that they subscribe to certain creeds that uphold “sound doctrine.” In the same way that the disciples journeyed with Jesus and gradually came to a realisation of their faith, so should the church without walls welcome people into fellowship and allow them to journey with us as they (and we) become more integrated into the Way of Jesus. Jesus’s “method” of evangelism is expressed perfectly in the simple invitation, as recorded in John’s gospel, to “come and see” (John 1:45–51). If this is the case, critical questions need to be asked about why so many evangelicals make it a pre-condition of Christian fellowship that one must be “born again”.

The missional task of the church is to witness to the compassion of Christ for the benefit of the watching world. Church without walls is “a place in which the reign of God begins to be made manifest here and now.”⁶⁹ Churches that thrive in post-Soviet Eurasia will be those communities of believers covenanted together in the love of Christ and exhibiting a radical witness guided by faithfulness to Christ, obedience to Scripture and an openness to the leading of the Holy Spirit. Above all, church without walls is a missional movement that builds communities of grace. Such communities are built not by programmes and strategies, but by *compassion*, which is both a Christian virtue and a missional imperative.⁷⁰ Compassion is the defining character of the Kingdom of God, which is concerned with relationships. Lesslie Newbigin rightly remarks that, “From its first page to its last, the Bible is informed by a vision of human nature for which neither freedom nor equality is

⁶⁹ Glen H. Stassen and David P. Gushee, *Kingdom Ethics: Following Jesus in Contemporary Context* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 2003), 230.

⁷⁰ Penner, “Scripture, community, and context in God’s mission in the FSU”, in Penner and Sawatsky (eds.), *Mission in the Former Soviet Union* (Schwarzenfeld: Neufeld Verlag, 2005), 22.

fundamental: what is fundamental is relatedness.”⁷¹ Compassion rooted in vision, covenant relationships, generous hospitality and inclusive community, must be both the object and point of departure of all of our educational and evangelistic endeavours. Compassion stands to mission in the same relation as fire to flame; compassion is the heart and soul of mission, its most basic essence and condition of its being. This integration of mission and compassion is consistent with Newbigin’s notion of “mission as love in action.”⁷²

Compassion thus remains a constant gospel principle to be practiced regardless of the cultural context, even though the ways in which compassion is demonstrated will vary according to the setting. In a context of social breakdown and deprivation, such as parts of urban areas in Eastern Ukraine, the element of compassion becomes particularly paramount. In a context where broken families, substance abuse, alcoholism, destitution and poverty are facts of everyday life for the majority of people, any “gospel” message of salvation, hope and new life in Christ that does not reach out to people with the compassion of Christ, however well intentioned or doctrinally sound, will not be heard and may even do more harm than good. There may even be some truth in Berdyaev’s remark that Soviet communism was God’s judgement on Christians for their denial of Christ’s teachings concerning human equality and social justice.⁷³

This point refers to what Ellul called “the universal responsibility of the Church and of Christians towards the world.” This responsibility consists not only in preaching the gospel, but also in facilitating “the forward progress of society, in its preservation, in the expression of the gospel in terms of justice, liberty and equality.”⁷⁴ Withdrawal into the false shelter of church walls is not an option for followers of Christ who want to be salt and light in their communities. Sin and evil are not merely personal issues, but also structural phenomena. Thus, Walter Wink maintains that, “Personal redemption cannot take place apart from the redemption of our social structures.”⁷⁵

Thus, whilst it is true that God cares about whether we lie or tell the truth as individuals, God also cares about institutions in government and the media that disseminate lies and misinformation to entire populations. As Richard Foster rightly notes, “we cannot

⁷¹ Newbigin, *Foolishness to the Greeks: The Gospel and Western Culture* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1986), 116.

⁷² Newbigin, *The Open Secret: An Introduction to the Theology of Mission* (London: SPCK, 1995), 40–55.

⁷³ Н. А. Бердяев, *История и смысл русского коммунизма* (Париж: YMCA, 1937).

⁷⁴ Ellul, *False Presence of the Kingdom* (New York: Seabury, 1972), 103.

⁷⁵ Walter Wink, *Unmasking the Powers: The Invisible Forces that Determine Human Existence* (Louisville: Fortress, 1986), 89.

speak of love and at the same time be part of institutional structures that perpetuate injustice.”⁷⁶ Therefore, as Christians, we cannot speak with integrity about loving our neighbour unless we are prepared to confront the social structures of corruption and oppression that create wealth and power for a privileged few, while the vast majority are deprived of dignity and freedom. There is, therefore, as Ellul claimed, “no separation between the preaching of the Gospel as such and the actualising of it in political structures.”⁷⁷

The church is thus called to become a humanising force in society that upholds spiritual values of truth and compassion. The church aims to facilitate the emergence of what Berdyaev calls “a form of social organisation in which the principles of personality, society and the state interact and mutually limit one another, giving the individual the greatest possible freedom of creative spiritual life.”⁷⁸ This requires the church to recognise that it is an integral part of civil society, which it is called to transform from the inside by transfiguring the degenerate (post-)Soviet vices of corruption, vulgarity and disrespect with the Christian values of integrity, honour and courtesy.

This kind of transformation demands a radical reformation of the church’s engagement with post-Soviet society. Civil society has a right to demand transparency, honesty and accountability from the church. Too often, the church has hypocritically absolved itself of political responsibility in the name of “gospel principles”. However, while talking about salvation and eternity, all too often the church has engaged in underhand business deals and political machinations in order to maintain its interests. Therefore, Christian values of honesty, dignity, freedom, justice and compassion need to be inculturated and embedded not just in explicit church activities, but in the mundane realities that govern social and personal relations in the nation as a whole. As Alexander Herzen averred, “There will be no freedom in the world until what is religious and political are turned into what is human and simple.”⁷⁹ The gospel message of the coming Kingdom of God can become a powerful change agent within post-Soviet society. The Ukrainian Revolution, in which hundreds of thousands of Christians participated – and in which dozens of Christians lost their lives to the bullets of Yanukovych’s Berkut snipers – has the potential to become a symbol of hope for church and society not only in Ukraine, but throughout the post-Soviet space.

⁷⁶ Foster, *Streams of Living Water: Celebrating the Great Traditions of Christian Faith* (Trowbridge: Eagle Publishing, 1999), 153.

⁷⁷ Ellul, *False Presence*, 102.

⁷⁸ Berdyaev, *Destiny of Man* (London: Geoffrey Bles, 1954), 252.

⁷⁹ Herzen, quoted in Berdyaev, *Slavery and Freedom* (London: Geoffrey Bles, 1948), 190.

The Revolution of Dignity has signalled a new era in which the post-Soviet church is awakened to its social responsibilities and is able to demonstrate solidarity with the people. In order for Christian values to become incarnated in the fabric of social relations, the church must jettison its obsequious dependence on the state. The church must also resist the temptation to collude with authoritarian political regimes that attempt to impose morality “from above” by the passing of legislation, such as laws that discriminate against homosexuals. Such legislation may have a thin veneer of Christianity, but is in fact a denial of the Christian faith and values, which can never be institutionally imposed or endorsed by ruling ideologies.⁸⁰ Rather, the church must embrace a vision of “open Christianity” and “church without walls.” This kind of Christianity facilitates the development of civil society by being free, humble, generous, hospitable, full of grace, and ready not just to judge and criticise, but also to listen, learn, serve and suffer for the sake of the Kingdom of God. Mykhailo Cherenkov, puts it well: “The mission of the ‘open church’ is to proclaim the gospel of the Kingdom, to discern, to bless, to participate in its highly diversified forms, directing people both within and outside of the Church in their spiritual search towards an encounter with Christ, wherever this meeting might occur.”⁸¹

The problem with recent missions in the post-Soviet space is that they have mainly been concerned with making occasional forays into society for testimony and to “catch” a few converts and bring them into the church. The open and inclusive missional vision of church without walls, by contrast, signifies movement in two directions. The church not only teaches society that which God reveals inside the church, but also learns from what God reveals to the church through social events and processes. With an open and transparent approach to society, the church ceases to be a “holy place” that is rigidly separated from the “secular world.” Social reality is seen as part of God’s creation. Society is the sphere of God’s effective action. Society is the public space which is sustained, redeemed, and sanctified by God’s presence. God is at work both inside and outside those spaces, which we designate as “sacred” and “secular.” All around the world God is active, beckoning us to participate with Him in the great work of redemption.

⁸⁰ Moreover, the church has a sacred duty to uphold the rights of all those in society, including homosexuals, who regularly suffer from marginalisation, discrimination and even violence in Ukraine and throughout post-Soviet Eurasia. The church can demonstrate solidarity with such groups and affirm the dignity and human rights of all people, regardless of their political views, social status or sexuality. The church can do this without endorsing the lifestyles and opinions of those whose values appear to some Christians to contradict biblical moral teachings.

⁸¹ Joshua T. Searle and Mykhailo N. Cherenkov, *A Future and a Hope: Mission, Theological Education and the Transformation of Post-Soviet Society* (Eugene: Wipf & Stock, 2014), 99.

A church without walls, which sees the dissemination of the values of the Kingdom of God to all spheres of society as an urgent gospel imperative, will likewise influence not just church congregations, but will thus reach out to transform educational institutions, theological think tanks, the media, and all the various infrastructure of civil society. A church that wants to work in tandem with the humanising forces of civil society will be concerned not to consolidate a religious institution based on order and hierarchy, but will be much more involved in building authentic communities of grace.

The success of this kind of mission is expressed not in the triumph of Christianity over society, but in compassion for and involvement in society. It makes sense to talk about solidarity as a missional imperative. What is preserved here is the social responsibility, the desire to influence and change, but without the naive optimism about Christianisation and Christendom. Mission signifies not so much a movement from the church into the world, but also a constant Christian presence in the world, not only through evangelistic activity, but also through the sacrament of living. This is not so much a course of action as it is a way of thinking and being. The church's mission in the world is realised in imperatives to proclaim and encourage, send and convert, to go and teach, but also in non-binding forms, such as being, living, sympathising, loving, salting, and shining the light of Christ in places of darkness.

Church without walls is a gospel-orientated vision of renewal that requires a reconnection between mission and discipleship, teaching and preaching, sanctification and conversion. The Great Commission of Christ speaks not about a hasty transfer of the truth, but the long and difficult work of missionary teachers with students, the Christian enlightenment of nations, and the formation of entire populations. Christ's gospel cannot be reduced to narrow, pietistic notions of "repenting of your sins and believing in Jesus, so you can go to heaven when you die." The gospel is a call to radical *metanoia*, to a fundamental reorientation of one's material relation towards God and towards one's neighbours. We demonstrate our fidelity to the gospel of Christ, not simply by adhering to sound doctrine, but by living and believing in accordance with the vision inspired by the world-changing events of incarnation, crucifixion and resurrection. Baptists, in particular, who often pride themselves on their commitment to the unshakeable authority of the Scriptures, must demonstrate not merely that they know what the "Word of God" is (Matthew 22:29), but must also show that they are capable of expressing it in the material reality of their lives by working in solidarity with society and the wider church. The post-Soviet Baptist community

now has a historic opportunity to lead the way into a vision of open Christianity and church without walls.

CONCLUSION

The Ukrainian Revolution of Dignity has unleashed a new impulse for wholesale social reform and a desire to jettison the burden of lingering neo-Sovietism and its dysfunctional modes of social interaction. It is difficult to predict what the outcome will be. As Hegel claimed, human actors are caught up in the drama, but no-one has seen the script. The Owl of Minerva takes flight only at dusk⁸² and we will only learn of the true significance of the Revolution of Dignity in hindsight.

But even now it is apparent that historians one hundred years hence will look back at the Revolution in 2013–14 as the time when Ukrainian society took a bold leap (as opposed to the previous timid steps) away from the post-Soviet vices of corruption, cynicism, and irresponsibility. The Revolution marks a return to the values of freedom, compassion and solidarity that proved so fatal to the Soviet Union in the late 1980s and which similarly, in due course, will deliver the *coup de grâce* to the equally discredited and dysfunctional regime of Vladimir Putin's Russia. From a Christian perspective, the Revolution may prove to be God's gracious call to the churches in the post-Soviet space to engage proactively in the transformation of unjust, corrupt social structures, to demonstrate solidarity with those fighting for freedom and justice and thereby to become salt and light to their society. Ukraine's Christian community, by demonstrating solidarity with its people, has helped to blaze a new trail out of the post-Soviet captivity of the church, which other countries in the region may now follow.

Perhaps, we may speculate that whenever Putin and his corrupt Kremlin apparatchiks are finally forced to release their stranglehold on Russian public opinion and when the church in Russia rediscovers its true prophetic voice, even Russia itself will have its own peaceful Revolution on Moscow's Red Square.⁸³ Whenever this happens, and when the Russian

⁸² Hegel, *Grundlinien der Philosophie des Rechts* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp 1986), 28.

⁸³ Unfortunately, the leaders of the Russian Baptists have generally supported the corrupt political authorities in Russia. A resolution issued by the Russian Baptist Union on 30 May 2014 expressed words of praise and gratitude to Vladimir Putin: "We express to you our special gratitude for defining the protection and strengthening of the spiritual and moral values, to which the traditional family belongs, as a task of primary importance." Moreover, in a second letter addressed to Putin, the RUECB praises the Russian President for "his

churches stand by their people in their legitimate aspirations for freedom and democracy (as their Ukrainian counterparts did in 2013/14), Russian Christians can expect from their Ukrainian brothers and sisters fervent prayers, material support and spiritual solidarity as they take a stand with the people on behalf of the Christian values of truth, justice, compassion, honesty, integrity, dignity and freedom.

When I look to the future of Ukraine I can see a vision of a reconciled church in Ukraine that transforms society, as the kingdoms of this world recede to make way for the kingdom of God (Rev 11:15). I can see a new era in which Orthodox (notwithstanding their different and sometimes conflicting loyalties), Catholics, Baptists, Pentecostals and others join together out of common reverence for Christ in order to infuse the social space with spiritual values of love, humanity, compassion, forgiveness and solidarity.

As I have been praying for Ukraine recently, I can see a vision beginning to emerge, even though it sometimes seems that I am peering through a glass darkly. But sometimes I can see it: I can see an Orthodox priest from Donetsk praying with a Pentecostal preacher from Kyiv. I can see them calling each other brothers and honouring and serving each other out of reverence to Christ. I can even see a Catholic monk from Lviv standing alongside a Baptist pastor from Moscow, and together praying that the peace of Christ would rule in their respective nations.

Perhaps this vision is naïve; perhaps it is unfeasible and utopian. But I hope we can have the faith to realise that with God all things are possible and that we might yet live to witness all of these things. This wish for a large-scale reconciliation between Orthodox, Catholics and Protestants in Ukraine is a worthy aspiration, which would constitute a significant and progressive step in Ukraine's long journey out of the post-Soviet transition. There may even be reconciliation between the Russian and Ukrainian churches. When Russians begin to see a strong Church in Ukraine that enjoys the love and respect of the people, they will come to visit, make friendships, and learn from their Ukrainian brothers and sisters about what it really means to be a "church without walls." And God will delight in this.

contribution to the strengthening of civil peace and harmony in Russian society." These statements are sadly reminiscent of Soviet times, when Baptists, who suffered disproportionately from Stalin's purges, sent congratulatory telegrams to Stalin, who was hailed as the "great friend of all believers." Russian Baptist leaders at that time assured the West that "within the Soviet Union there is not a single prisoner of conscience." The submissive attitude of Russian Baptists today may be explained by the fact that the Russian Baptist community, in common with everyone else in Putin's Russia, lives in an atmosphere of intimidation, threat and surveillance by the Russian authorities.

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Church Without Walls:

Post-Soviet Baptists After the Ukrainian Revolution, 2013-14

Recent events in Ukraine have forced post-Soviet evangelicals to address a question they had long avoided: 'in what way is the gospel not only the source of personal salvation, but also the source of social transformation?' This lecture advances the provocative argument that instead of calling the people to repent and make peace, the church itself should repent for betraying the people, and for failing for so many years to speak truthfully to those in power and to stand on the side of the oppressed. It is argued that Baptists in both Ukraine and Britain need to reject the kind of narrow pietism that over-emphasises individual salvation, and should instead rediscover their holistic mission, in which both the individual and society become complementary parts of the overall Christian vision of biblically-informed action on behalf of the overriding biblical imperative of social justice. The lecture concludes on a hopeful note by showing that despite their limited numbers, Baptists can be in the vanguard of a new movement (a 'church without walls') for the reformation of the church and the renewal of society, which moves towards an open future with hope for greater freedom. While drawing on the author's experience of living and working in Ukraine, this lecture also addresses vital issues that affect the global Baptist community, such as the missional imperatives of social justice and solidarity and the limits of political authority.

"This outstanding lecture by the British Baptist theologian, Dr Joshua Searle, offers something extremely valuable to the global Christianity by showing how the light of the Gospel shines not only within the church, but outside its walls in the wider society. Searle issues a prophetic challenge to the church to recover its calling to serve the Kingdom of God through dynamic engagement in the public sphere. I pray that this lecture will be an encouragement and a

challenge to Baptists and the wider Christian community – in Ukraine, Britain and the global church – to imagine what a 'church without walls' might look like and to understand God's plan for the redemption of the nations and the reconciliation of all things."

Dr Mykhailo Cherenkov, *Vice President of Mission Eurasia and Professor at Ukrainian Catholic University*



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